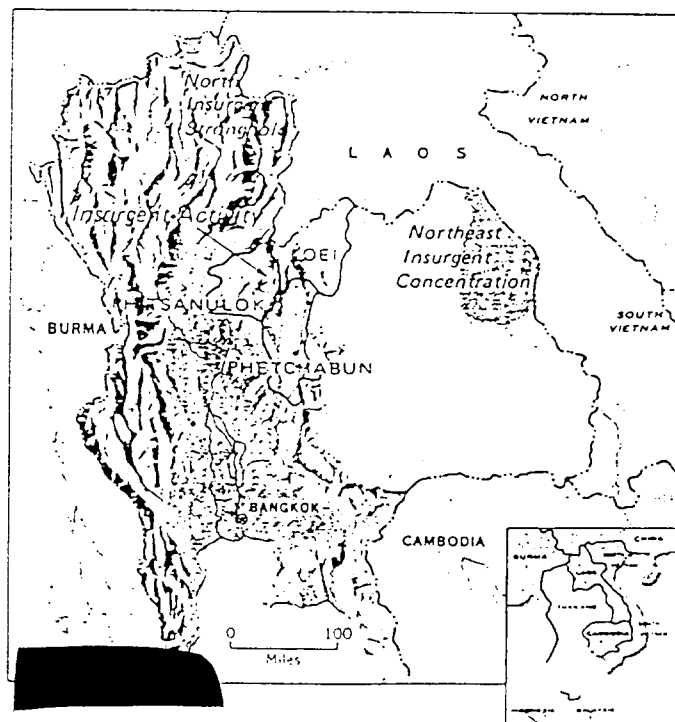


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INSURGENT ACTIVITY GAINS IN NORTH-CENTRAL THAILAND

The recent upsurge of Communist activity in the north-central area is a fresh reminder of the difficulties the Thai Government faces in bringing insurgency under control.

Security has deteriorated rapidly in the Phitsanulok-Phetchabun-Loei border region, where only three months ago there was no overt insurrection. Guerrillas successfully attacked a government hill-tribe training center in late November and since then have almost continuously harassed police and military units. For almost two weeks, the guerrillas have been beating back efforts to evacuate provincial police platoons surrounded in two tribal villages. At least one helicopter has been shot down as it tried to resupply the beleaguered men.



[REDACTED]

It is not clear how many insurgents are involved in the north-central offensive, or whether they have been augmented with elements from Laos. The tenacity, skill, and planning that the insurgents have demonstrated, however, make this their best effort since the Thai insurgency began four years ago and suggest that veterans are leading the insurrection.

The guerrillas are disrupting the government's embryonic village security programs, and the already tenuous hold of the government on the allegiance of the tribal people has been further weakened. Government reaction thus far has been limited to sporadic air strikes and piecemeal reinforcements. A new joint command headquarters has been set up in the area, however, in an effort to improve coordination among the various security elements operating there.

The reverses the government has suffered in the north-central

region over the past month have had a strong psychological effect that may be prolonged. Rumors among the Thai population in the area about other impending guerrilla attacks reveal a sense of insecurity and foreboding that the Communists have failed to generate elsewhere in Thailand. Strong racial feeling has also been whipped up by the fact that the insurgents are largely Meo tribesmen.

The difficulties the Communists have been encountering in the northeast, where insurgent activity is still at a low level, may be one reason that Communist efforts in the north and north-central areas have increased. Although the Communists probably believe that the future of the insurgency will not be decided among the tribal people, they may calculate that dramatic progress in the tribal areas will provide a needed sense of momentum for their over-all effort. [REDACTED]

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